



Introduction to the Core Values of Low Demand Homeless Programs

M. Scott Young, PhD

Research Associate Professor
University of South Florida

Paul Smits, LCSW

Senior Policy Analyst
University of South Florida



Overview

- What Are Low Demand Homeless Programs?
- Brief History
- Core Values
- Philosophy of the Core Values
- Practicing the Core Values
- Questions That New Programs Frequently Have



What Are Low Demand Homeless Programs?

- Community-based early recovery models
- Provide supportive housing
- Utilize harm reduction practices
- Serve hard-to-reach and hard-to-engage chronically homeless individuals with severe mental health and/or substance use disorders
- Do not require sobriety or compliance with treatment for admission or continued stay



Brief History of Low Demand Homeless Programs

- Early Low Demand Homeless Programs were called Safe Havens
- First Safe Haven opened in 1984 (Privately Funded)
- 1992 Amendments to McKinney Homeless Assistance Act Authorized Federal Funding of Safe Havens
- McKinney Act defined Safe Havens as *a form of supportive housing that serves hard-to-reach homeless persons with severe mental illness who are on the street and have been unable or unwilling to participate in supportive services.*
- McKinney Act specified:
 - 24-hour residence for eligible persons who may reside for unspecified duration
 - private or semi-private accommodations
 - overnight occupancy limited to 25 persons
 - Low Demand services and referrals
 - supportive services to eligible persons



Core Values of Low Demand Homeless Programs

A Low Demand Homeless Program:

- **Does not** require **sobriety** as a condition of admission or continued stay
- **Does not** require **compliance with treatment** as a condition of admission or continued stay
- Targets chronically homeless with mental health and/or substance use problems
- Targets individuals who have not fared well in traditional housing programs



Core Values, Continued

A Low Demand Homeless Program:

- Focuses program rules on staff and resident safety
- Does not include zero tolerance policies in its program rules
- Keeps demands to a minimum
- Keeps the environment of care as non-invasive as possible



Core Values, Continued

A Low Demand Homeless Program:

- Views resident episodes of substance use, intoxication, compliance problems, and rule infractions as opportunities to engage residents, NOT as reasons to discharge or impose sanctions
- Engages residents using harm reduction and motivational interviewing strategies, with a primary focus of attaining and maintaining permanent housing



Philosophy of the Core Values

The Low Demand Housing Model is based on acceptance that not all mental health and substance use problems can "be fixed."

However good our intentions are, it is important to remember that Low Demand GPD programs are, first and foremost, HOUSING Programs.



Practicing the Core Values

- Flexibility and adaptability
- Working knowledge of stages of change
- Working knowledge of trauma-informed care principles
- Experience with motivational interviewing
 - Be encouraging, but not insisting
 - Expectations are high, but demands are low
 - Meet resident where they are, which is usually in the pre-contemplation stage of change



Practicing the Core Values, Continued

- Leave the rules of a sobriety-based program behind
- Use relapses and infractions as opportunities for engagement
- Work with each individual's recovery in very small steps and be patient
- Tolerate minor rule infractions (curfew, shouting, arguing, etc.)
- Use Safe Rooms and Sobering Lounges
- Let residents know, and remind them, that they can always return without the need to feel ashamed



Questions That New Programs Frequently Have

Can I operate all my GPD Programs with the same set of rules?

The Low Demand Model is uniquely different, and the operating rules and policies should reflect and be tailored to the core values and nuances of the Model.

Rules that cite “Zero Tolerance” policies should especially be reviewed.



Is this Approach for Everyone?

No, the approach targets the following individuals:

- Chronically homeless Veterans w/behavioral health challenges
- Veterans who have not fared well in traditional programs
- Veterans who CANNOT or WILL NOT stop drinking and using
- Veterans who are not fully compliant with treatment

The approach is not meant to replace traditional homeless programs.

The approach is not intended for Veterans who want, and would be best served by, a program that supports sobriety and compliance with treatment.



Are There No Rules in a Low Demand Program?

- There are rules, but they should be kept to a minimum.
- The rules should focus on staff and resident safety.
- Demands are low, but expectations are high.
- Program participation and minor rule violations are not used to expel residents from the program.
- Rule violations, lack of participation, problems with sobriety, and staying clean should be seen as opportunities to engage residents rather than expelling them.
- Keep the focus on housing.



Structure of Low Demand GPD Technical Assistance

- Conducted in Microsoft Teams on 1st and 3rd Tuesdays monthly
- 1st Tuesdays for program and VA staff from ALL Low Demand GPD programs
- 3rd Tuesdays devoted to reviewing Low Demand basics with:
 - Staff working with programs new to Low Demand GPD
 - New staff working with experienced Low Demand GPD
 - All other interested Low Demand GPD VA and program staff
- All materials and information are distributed to the Low Demand GPD contact list via email and Teams invitations



VA NATIONAL CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS AMONG VETERANS

Promoting data-driven, evidence-based solutions to end Veteran homelessness

Questions? / Discussion